

## Kiñci Saṅkhāra Sutta<sup>1</sup>

### The Discourse on Any Formation

[Things that one of right view would never do]

(Aṅguttara Nikāya 6.93/3:439)

Translated by Piya Tan ©2004

#### 1 Introduction

This series of three suttas on impermanence show their vital significance in the attainment of sainthood (spiritual liberation), for which the contemplation of impermanence has to be complete. In other words, the contemplation of impermanence should be applied to all the five aggregates, as admonished in **the Anicca,saññā Sutta** (S 22.102).<sup>2</sup> **The Aniccā Sutta** (A 6.98)<sup>3</sup> declares: one who sees permanence in any phenomenon will never be able to realize sainthood. Such a distinctive feature is this of the stream-winner, that—as stated in **the Kiñci Saṅkhāra Sutta** (A 6.93)—he is said to be incapable of believing any phenomenon to be permanent.

**The Sīti Vagga** of the Aṅguttara has four suttas with the title **Abhabba-ṭ,ṭhāna Sutta**,<sup>4</sup> of which the Kiñci Saṅkhāra Sutta is the second, hence, it is the *Dutiya Abhabba-ṭ,ṭhāna Sutta* (the Second Discourse on the Impossible). All these suttas deal with things that “one with right view” would never commit. **The Bahu,dhātuka Sutta** (M 115),<sup>5</sup> however, gives a more detailed list of “impossibilities” (*abhabba-ṭ,ṭhānā*), along with their related “possibilities” (*bhabba-ṭ,ṭhānā*). [3]

#### 2 Exegesis

Those passages of the Kiñci Saṅkhāra Sutta [§2(1-4)] that have parallels in **the Bahu,dhātuka Sutta** (M 115),<sup>6</sup> are explained in the Majjhima Commentary. In the first passage—that “It is impossible that a person who has gained right view would regard any formation as permanent” [§2(1)]—the Commentary says that here a person who has gained right view (*diṭṭhi,sampanno*) is a stream-winner, a noble disciple who has a view of the path. “Formation” (*saṅkhāra*) here refers to a “conditioned formation” (*saṅkhata,-saṅkhāra*) [ie anything conditioned]. (MA 4:107)

In the second passage—that “It is impossible that a person who has gained right view would regard any formation as pleasurable” [§2(2)]—the Commentary says that a noble disciple other than the arhat can still apprehend formations as pleasurable *but* with a mind free from wrong view: he does not have the view that any formation is pleasurable. When perceptions and thoughts of formations as pleasurable arise in him, he knows reflectively that such notions are mistaken. (MA 4:107 f)

In the third passage—that “It is impossible that a person who has gained right view would regard *anything* as self” [§2(3)]—“formation” is replaced by “thing” (*dhamma*).<sup>7</sup> The Majjhima Commentary says that this substitution includes concepts, such as a kaṣiṇa sign, etc, which the ordinary worldling is likely to identify as the self (MA 4:108). Moreover, Bodhi adds,<sup>8</sup> since nirvana is described as “imperishable” (*accuta*) and as “happiness” (*sukha*), it could very likely be mistaken as self.<sup>9</sup> As such, the word *saṅkhāra* may be mistaken to refer to both the conditioned and the unconditioned.

<sup>1</sup> Also called *Dutiya Abhabba-ṭ,ṭhāna Sutta* (the Second Discourse on the Impossible).

<sup>2</sup> S 22.102/3:155-157 = SD 12.12.

<sup>3</sup> A 6.98/3:441 f = SD 12.13.

<sup>4</sup> A 6.92-95/3:438-440: *Paṭhama Abhabba-ṭ,ṭhāna S, Dutiya Abhabba-ṭ,ṭhāna S, Tatiya Abhabba-ṭ,ṭhāna S, Catuṭṭha Abhabba-ṭ,ṭhāna S* and *Pañcama Abhabba-ṭ,ṭhāna S* respectively.

<sup>5</sup> M 115.12-13/3:64 f.

<sup>6</sup> M 115.12-13/3:64 f.

<sup>7</sup> Cf *sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā ti...sabbe saṅkhārā dukkhā ti...sabbe dhammā anattā ti* (Dh 277-279).

<sup>8</sup> M:ÑB 1325 n1086.

<sup>9</sup> See **Mūla,pariyāya Sutta**, M 1.26/1:4.

In the third passage—that “It is impossible that a person who has gained right view would commit any heinous karma” [§2(4)]—the Majjhima Commentary states that a noble disciple is, in fact, incapable of intentionally depriving *any* living being of life. Matricide and parricide are mentioned [in the Bahu,-dhātuka Sutta] to stress the dangerous side of the worldling’s condition as contrasted against the power (*bala*) of the noble disciple. (MA 4:108)

The term *kotūhala,maṅgala* (“strange rituals to invoke luck”) [§2(5)] resolves as *kotūhala* (vl *kutūhala*), “excitement, curiosity” and *maṅgala*, “auspiciousness, luck.” *Kotūhala* also refers to “strange and noisy rituals.” As such, *kotūhala,maṅgala* may also be translated as “rituals and luck.” Following such superstitions is synonymous with “attachment to rites and rituals” (*sīla-b,bata parāmāsa*), one of the mental fetters broken by the stream-winner.<sup>10</sup>

### 3 The uninstructed worldling

One who has not cultivated the path to awakening is often called an “**uninstructed worldling**” (*asutavā puthujjano*), literally, “one born of the crowd, who hears not.” He is said to be unskilled (*akoviḍa*), that is, he lacks even a theoretical knowledge of the Dharma, and is undisciplined (*avinīta*), that is, he also lacks practical training in the Dharma. He is not a “seer of the noble ones” (*ariya,dassavī*), that is, he fails to see the Buddha or the noble disciples (the saints), because he lacks the wisdom-eye that discerns the truth that they have seen.<sup>11</sup>

The terms “noble ones” (*ariya*) and “true persons” (*sappurisa*)<sup>12</sup> are often synonymous. However, in such places as in **the Pārileyya Sutta** (S 22.81),<sup>13</sup> *sappurisa* clearly includes those, although not yet on the path, but assure of it, namely, the faith-follower (*saddhā’nusārī*) and the truth-follower (*dhammānusārī*).<sup>14</sup>

In **the Caṇḍāla Sutta** (A 3:206),<sup>15</sup> the impossibility of resorting to superstition [§2(5)] is said of a true lay disciple (*upāsaka*). The false lay follower—an outcaste follower (*upāsaka,caṇḍāla*), the stained lay follower (*upāsaka,mala*), the low lay follower (*upāsaka,patikiṭṭho*):

- (1) He lacks faith.
- (2) He lacks moral virtue.
- (3) He believes in rituals to invoke luck.
- (4) He relies on luck, not on karma.<sup>16</sup>
- (5) He seeks the gift-worthy outside the Teaching and there gives his priority.<sup>17</sup>

Another “impossibility” of the true lay follower—that of putting his priority outside the Teaching [§2(6)]—is mentioned in **the Parihānā Sutta** (A 4:25)<sup>18</sup> and **the Parābhava Sutta** (A 4:26),<sup>19</sup> amongst their identical list of seven causes of a lay follower’s decline, namely:

<sup>10</sup> That is, the 2<sup>nd</sup> “**mental fetter**” (*saṃyojanā*); the other two fetters broken by the stream-winner are (1) self-view (*sakkāya,dīṭṭhi*) (the notion that one or all the 5 aggregates constitute one’s self) and (3) spiritual doubt (*vickicchā*). On the 10 fetters, see M 22.34n in SD 3.13.

<sup>11</sup> See eg **Alaggadūpama S** (M 22.15-16/1:135 f). Comys at MA 1:20-25; SA 2:98-101, 2:251 f; AA 1:61-63; Nc 75-78; Pm 2:445-449; DhsA 348-354.

<sup>12</sup> The *sappurisa*’s qualities are given at D 33.2.2(6)/3:252, 34.1.8(7)/3:283; M 113; A 7.64/4:113, 8:38/4:144 f & at M 110.14-24/3:23 f.

<sup>13</sup> **The Pārileyya S** explains that the uninstructed worldling is one who holds the view that the aggregates (ie the body) is the self, that the 5 aggregates constitute a personal identity (*sakkāya*)—one of the 3 fetters preventing one from gaining stream-entry: see SD 3.3(2). He clings to one or more of the self-identity views (*sakkāya,dīṭṭhi*): the aggregate as the self, the self as possessing the aggregate, the aggregate as in the self, or the self as in the aggregate (S 22.81/3:94-99) = SD 6.1.

<sup>14</sup> On the *saddhā,nusārī* and the *dhammānusārī*, see esp **Cakkhu S** (S 25.1) = SD 16.7.

<sup>15</sup> A 5.175/3:206.

<sup>16</sup> *Kotūhala,maṅgaliko hoti, maṅgalam pacceti, no kammam.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ito ca bahiddhā dakkhiṇeyyam gavesati tattha ca pubba,kāram karoti.*

<sup>18</sup> A 7.27/4:25.

- (1) He fails to see the monks.
- (2) He neglects to hear the True Dharma.
- (3) He does not train in what is related to moral virtue.
- (4) He has often lacks faith in the monks, whether elder, middling or new.
- (5) He listens to the Dharma with a hostile mind, seeking faults.
- (6) He seeks the gift-worthy outside the Teaching and there gives his priority.

#### 4 Related suttas

The first four statements of the Kiñci Saṅkhāra Sutta [§2(1-4)] are also found in **the Bahudhātuka Sutta** (M 115),<sup>20</sup> **the Aṭṭhāna Vagga** of the Āṅguttara (A 1.15)<sup>21</sup> and **the Vibhaṅga**.<sup>22</sup> The first three statements—that one with right view would not regard any formation as permanent, any formation as pleasurable, and any thing as self—are all found verbatim in all four references. The fourth statement—that one with right view would not commit any “**heinous karma**” (*ānantariya,kamma*)<sup>23</sup>—is merely mentioned by its heading in the Kiñci Saṅkhāra Sutta, but listed in full in the other three texts, thus:

It is impossible that a person who has gained right view would deprive his mother of life.  
 It is impossible that a person who has gained right view would deprive his father of life.  
 It is impossible that a person who has gained right view would deprive an arhat of life.  
 It is impossible that a person who has gained right view would with an evil mind shed the Tathagata’s blood.  
 It is impossible that a person who has gained right view would divide [cause a schism in] the Sangha.

Other related suttas—**the Caṇḍāla Sutta** (A 3:206),<sup>24</sup> **the Parihānā Sutta** (A 4:25)<sup>25</sup> and **the Parābhava Sutta** (A 4:26)—have already been mentioned earlier [2].

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<sup>19</sup> A 7.28-30/4:26.

<sup>20</sup> M 115.12-13/3:64 f.

<sup>21</sup> A 1.15.1-8/1:26 f.

<sup>22</sup> Vbh §809/335 f.

<sup>23</sup> *ānantariya,kamma* (vī *anantariya*-), lit “karma entailing immediate effect.”

<sup>24</sup> A 5.175/3:206.

<sup>25</sup> A 7.27/4:25.

## The Discourse on Any Formation

(A 6.93/3:439)

1 Monks, there are these six impossible things. What are the six?

2 (1) It is impossible that a person who has gained right view would regard any formation as per-  
manent.

(2) It is impossible that a person who has gained right view would regard any formation as pleasur-  
able.

(3) It is impossible that a person who has gained right view would regard *anything* as self.<sup>26</sup>

(4) It is impossible that a person who has gained right view would commit any heinous karma.<sup>27</sup>

(5) It is impossible that a person who has gained right view would rely on purification through  
strange rituals to invoke luck.<sup>28</sup>

(6) It is impossible that a person who has gained right view would seek for the gift-worthy outside  
the Teaching.<sup>29</sup>

Monks, these are the six impossible things.

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<sup>26</sup> *Abhabbo diṭṭhi, sampanno puggalo kañci dhammanī attato upagantum.*

<sup>27</sup> “Heinous karma,” *ānantariya, kamma* (v1 *anantariya-*), lit “karma entailing immediate effect.” See Introd (3).

<sup>28</sup> *Abhabbo diṭṭhi, sampanno puggalo kotūhala, maṅgalena suddhiṃ paccāgantum.* The term *kotūhala, maṅgala* resolves as *kotūhala* (v1 *kutūhala*), “excitement, curiosity,” and *maṅgala*, “auspiciousness, luck.” See Introd (2).

<sup>29</sup> *Abhabbo diṭṭhi, sampanno puggalo ito bahiddhā dakkhiṇeyyam gavesitum.* See Introd (2).